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HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE GCC: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO THE CONTINUITY OF FORCED LABOR TRAFFICKING

By

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Abstract

The prominence of human trafficking across the world is a complex and ever-changing concept that has become a growing issue within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). For this project I analyzed the specificity of labor trafficking within the GCC countries. I was able to find compelling factors that directly influence the continuance of human trafficking in the GCC countries. The ascendancy of the Kafala system and unavailing labor laws have been the instigating factors that have and continue to develop labor trafficking in the GCC. In combination with the previous factors, the COVID-19 pandemic and the current refugee crisis reshaped labor trafficking into a modernized crisis in the GCC. Through investigating these influential forces, I identified various trends that highlight the extent of the impact of labor trafficking in the GCC.

1. Introduction

The realm of human trafficking has many components that deserve to be prioritized and thoroughly investigated. One of the most trying and everchanging units is service based labor trafficking. Labor trafficking is defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (established by the United States but is applicable worldwide) as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery" (Administration for Children & Families, 2000). Within this paper, I present how former and current factors influence the debilitating industry of service-based labor within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The GCC consists of six countries: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The GCC is the focus of this project because the six countries possess similar attitudes towards foreign labor. All six of these countries are highly reliant of foreign labor (Admin, 2016), so much so, migrant workers make up almost ¾ of the working class within the GCC (Sherman, 2022).

The uniqueness of foreign labor in the GCC countries stem from their dependence on the Kafala system. The Kafala System is a sponsorships system that enables foreign workers to work in the GCC if they are sponsored (employed) by employers/ institutions that have sponsorship permits (Robinson, 2022). This sponsorship relationship between the employer and employee is one where employers are given the freedom to control all aspect of the migrant worker's life. Employers have full discretion to decide what living and working conditions workers are given. Various labor laws enforced in the GCC countries have tried to limit the power of employer's discretion and lower the possibility of forced labor trafficking. The reality is that such laws are never truly enforced and therefore have no holding (Murray, 2012). The former elements of

constraint are the Kafala system and ineffective labor laws. The current factors that have led to the persistence of labor trafficking is the current refugee crisis, and COVID-19. These prominent components have been the reason why working abroad for labor workers has become a life sentence of forced labor.

The greater part of individuals who work service labor jobs within the GCC migrate from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Nepal (International Labor Organization, 2012). Nearly all labor workers that are employed within the GCC come from impoverished conditions with limited employment opportunities within their hometowns. Various recruitment agencies use deceptive promotional tactics, like guaranteeing workers high wages for labor jobs. Upon arrival, workers usually only receive half of what they agreed upon when they start working. Recruiters attempt to convince workers to move away from their families and work within the GCC by misleading workers with artificial conditions. Working abroad is presented to them as a once in a lifetime opportunity for economic prosperity. Once workers agree, recruitment agencies deceive workers into paying various additional "recruitment fees". Firstly, these fees are very much illegal, but they also ensure that workers come to the GCC with little money in their pockets (Javaid, 2020). Many of the illegal fees listed by the recruitment agencies are 'necessary processing fees, medical test, documents inspections, flight fees, and orientation fees' (Migration Data Portal, 2021).

The beginning stages of forced labor trafficking is due to ineffective labor laws that have been limited in their effect and enforcement within the GCC. In the past, the laws and regulations passed within the GCC were intended to prohibit companies from tricking workers by applying factitious fees and conditions within migrant workers' contracts. A few examples of regulations introduced within the GCC are the Wages Protection System, the Flexi Permit, and the Labor

Market Regulatory Authority's dual/ tripartite contract system. The Wages Protection System was implemented by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development in Saudi Arabia in 2020 where employers must input salaries within the system and have a registered payroll file approved before they distribute wages (PwC, 2020). The Flexi Permit was implemented in the UAE and allows workers to live in the country work with multiple employers without a sponsor for about two years' time (Aarthi & Sahu). The LMRA's dual/ tripartite contact system was implemented in Bahrain and enforces domestic workers security of conditions by having one standard contract between the recruitment agency, the worker, and the employer as well as a following contract between the worker and the employer. (ILO, 2019).

Unfortunately, employers have been able to camouflage themselves and their illegal acts well within the gray areas of the regulations passed. For example, many employers have been able to pay off enforcers of the wage protection laws to let them proceed with withholding wages from workers (HRW, 2020). The issue stems from the lack of consequences for employers who disobey these laws and regulations. Therefore, these laws and regulations have historically made much of a difference in lessening the number of individuals being labor trafficked to the GCC.

Even with various labor protective laws passed each year by each GCC country, the power of the Kafala system is another key factor that ensures workers are stuck within their employment contracts. According to the Kafala system, each worker's employer is the sole individual that manages the conditions of migrant workers' contracts. Employers define their freedom of movement, length of contracts, payment, safety, and are in possession of their official identification documents (Damir-Geilsdorf & Pelican, 2018). The Kafala system has and continues to control the well-being of migrant workers who arrive in the GCC. By restraining their rights

and abilities, their employers can control their lives of service despite labor trafficking being illegal in the GCC.

The expansive power of the Kafala system "not only creates conditions for much of these violations, but also systematically produces a new population of readily exploitable workers" (Pande, 2013). The system provides consistent opportunities for migrant workers to, firstly, become victims of labor trafficking by making their sponsor their sole contact, and, secondly, guarantees their involuntary stay by allowing employers to have the freedom to withhold their employees' passports and wages. The heightened recruitment of workers from impoverished countries has allowed the countries in the GCC to recruit workers who they believe are naive and have little to no knowledge of the Kafala system. Many migrant workers do not know or question the "supportive" Kafala system, and it is not until they arrive, they realize the magnitude of its effects.

Currently, the refugee crisis has also contributed to the persistence of forced labor trafficking. The heightened wartime conditions within various countries surrounding the GCC has led to increased migration to work the GCC countries. Due to the GCC countries not signing the UN 1951 Refugee Convection, these six countries do not recognize those fleeing their country escaping imaginational wartime conditions, as refugees. The only allow migrant workers within their borders, therefore, refugees are forced to become migrant workers to escape persecution or war within their country (Khazaal, 2016). The opportunity for individuals to work in the labor force in the Middle East is presented as one of the greatest work opportunities, as they are the largest employers of international labor workers (Thiollet, 2011).Refugee workers are one of most vulnerable victims of labor trafficking. High unemployment rates force many jobless workers to

look for opportunities outside their community, and therefore, eventually work with recruitment agencies within their hometowns to help them work abroad.

Refugees face many challenges since the reality differs drastically from what the labor agencies in their home countries have told them about working in the GCC. Many refugee workers feel isolated when they arrive, due to the language barrier and them also not knowing the area. The majority of expatriate workers arrive as outsiders, who traveled to the GCC to work within the labor sector to earn money for their families. Then, within a couple of months the once promising opportunity turns into a swindle where the complex laws and regulations within the GCC constrain them for an unpredictable amount of time.

In addition, COVID-19 furthered the GCC countries' ability to worsen conditions for migrant workers, without any consequences. The pandemic allowed the opportunity for employers to lower wages and overall living conditions, taking advantage of the global lockdown and economic slowdown caused by COVID-19 (Foley & Piper, 2021). During COVID-19, there were slim to no health and safety precautions taken by employers, nor any precautions enforced by recruiting agencies as the pandemic was at its peak (Tazyeen et al., 2021). This allowed many recruiting agencies to continue to recruit desperate workers in addition to constraining the thousands of workers within inhabitable environments. COVID-19 workers received significantly lower wages and had a high probability of being laid off with no pay (Foley & Piper, 2021). Many employers decided to utterly abandon migrant workers entirely with no pay and no resources to return home (McQue,2022).

Agreeing to the facade of the benefits of working abroad, workers have no knowledge of the reality of their journey. The issues begin with the recruiting agencies that know the labor laws of the GCC and what will happen to these workers. These agencies exploit the workers by

continuing to recruit them to solely benefit the interest of the companies and the employers who pay them. When workers realize the reality of their employment, they are left with no way to report, escape, or leave their contract. The consequences of workers reporting their employers or agencies are severe. This has resulted in their inability to report or escape out of fear of life threating penalties (Human Rights Watch, 2012).

To this end, I will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1) What roles do the former and current key factors play in contributing to the continuity of labor trafficking of migrant workers in the GCC?
2) How have these factors led to worsening conditions of individuals working abroad in the GCC?

2. Background

The acknowledgement of the mistreatment of migrant workers started from the time of foreign workers migrating to the Middle East in the early 20th century to work to extract pearls from the Persian Gulf. With many workers arriving and working, the Kafala system was developed to define and protect local firms who employed foreign workers (Robinson, 2022).The word kafala in Arabic mean sponsorship/adoption, where their employer is called 'kafeel' who sponsors/adopt migrant workers to work for them. Then came the oil boom in the Arab states in the 1950s. The discovery of oil was a huge success for the Arab states, as they suddenly became distinguishable from any nation, and the discovery was known to unveil them as the "largest source of petroleum in the world" (National Geographic Society, 2022). Soon there was an urgency to extract as much oil as possible to generate the greatest amount of money possible. This led to the large migration of workers moving to the GCC to meet the demand needed to extract the oil.

The Kafala system then expanded its regulations to ensure productivity and profit. Many of the rules restrained the workers from being able to participate economically or politically in the GCC countries they worked in (Lenderking et al., 2015). Their limited stay within the GCC was soon defined by this distinct contract that determined the conditions they must adhere to within their stay. The Kafala system today holds many of the same restraints and restrictions it did in the 1950s. Specifically, the system still guarantees a life-long commitment for workers to labor and to their sponsors (Geilsdorf & Pelican, 2018). This clause within the sponsorship system defined the relationship between the employer and the employee, confined workers' communication to solely be with their employer. Employers have endless power and control of the livelihood of their unknowledgeable foreign workers who are left with no resources to support themselves upon arriving (Stern, 2015).

The recent advocacy for foreign laborers has been an issue taken up by many advocacy organizations and the issue has become transnational knowledge. Currently, the GCC states have the highest percentage of forced labor within the Arab states which is reported to be 5.3 per a thousand people in 2022 (ILO, 2022). Within the GCC states, migrants make up 70% of their employed population (Sherman, 2022). Many researchers believe the high rates of forced labor in the GCC are due to slavery being abolished only recently, in the late 20th century. Many argue slavery never really ended, and that it camouflaged into modern enslavement of foreign laborers (Hanzlickova, 2017). Most labor workers work within construction, hospitality, or domestic service sectors (ILO, 2022). Within these sectors, workers suffer from abusive employers, low or non-existent wages, instances of sexual violence, and inhabitable living conditions.

With more complaints of the forced labor injustice against migrant workers surfacing, the GCC decided to put on conventions and reform initiatives in order to combat this issue. Programs like the Domestic Workers Convention, which was held in 2011, were implemented to increase standardization of regulations for migrant workers. Specifically, the convention provided protection of fundamental principles and rights for workers, including "freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced or compulsory labor and child labor, and the eradication of employment and occupational discrimination" (Murray, 2012, pg. 464). Many of the GCC countries were quick to state that they have pushed for better labor laws and regulations, but many are moving a lot slower than what is needed of them. The reason is that the GCC knows that if they eliminate the injustices, they will significantly decrease their productivity and overall profit for overworking migrants. For many years many elites within the GCC believe foreign workers are the key to their industrial development and economic prosperity (Winckler, 2010).

Various violations of the rights of migrant workers have been highlighted by many news networks and documentaries in the past years (McQue, 2022). Within the GCC, most reports are of authorities eliminating their freedom of expression, association and assembly by imprisoning and punishing those who speak out against the violations committed against them (Amnesty International, 2020). These individuals were greatly supported by various labor organizations and Non-governmental organizations or NGOs, who helped many workers escape. But in early 2019, COVID-19 took over the media and filled the news with the destruction the virus imposed on the world. As a result of the world switching gears, funding decreased for NGOs combating labor trafficking and the progress to prevent labor trafficking of migrants deflated (Rojanaworarit & El

Bouzaidi, 2021). In fact, many workers were among the worst to be effected by the virus, with having no medical insurance, no ability to obtain medicine, or any way to social distance.

Migrant workers faced detrimental salary cuts, worsened health conditions, and high rates of layoffs during the pandemic (Tazyeen et al, 2021). Constrained by their contracts with no mention of pandemic precautions, migrant workers were left with minimal choices when their employer cut their wages. Nevertheless, most workers decided to continue to work (Janardhan, 2022). By taking advantage of the desperation the workers had for their jobs, their employers decided to save money by cutting wages and jobs in general.

Those who lost their jobs were left abandoned and with no means to ensure their own safety or ability to return to their home countries. Therefore, foreign workers "became stranded in countries where they typically remain excluded from accessing social protection provisions and thus forced to accept poorer terms and conditions of employment" (Foley & Piper, 2021, pg. 469). The pandemic consumed the attention of many countries including the GCC as well. The focus was on eliminating the virus and creating safe conditions for citizens. The rights of migrant workers slipped through the cracks and resulted in large counts of violations of various freedoms of migrant workers. The GCC states' objective of prioritizing modernity and economic prosperity have also led to unacceptable living and working conditions for migrant workers. Various allegations have been blatantly ignored regarding the health and safety of the workers (Amnesty International, 2022). The GCC's dependence on construction and non-domestic workers is crucial to achieving their developmental goals.

On the other hand, the heightened rates of refugees migrating into the GCC is not a new concept but has grown exponentially in recent years. The constant political unrest in neighboring counties to the GCC has resulted in this increase. In 2020, the United Nations Department of

Economics and Social Affairs (UNDESA) found that almost 75% of migrants and refugees in the Arab region were living in the GCC (ILO,2020). Uncertainty is a constant motive for refugees, and many are desperate to find work and economic prosperity within their new place of stay. As discussed, recruiting agencies work in the hometowns of migrant workers, and prey on locals' desperation for work. Since the current refugee crisis began, recruiters have preyed on refugees and used the same tactics used on locals to traffic them to the GCC. Specifically, "capitalizing on their vulnerability, traffickers deceive refugees into fraudulent travel and employment arrangements" (Bro, 2019). The decision to leave is also not one refugees make easily, but many are fleeing to avoid torture, persecution, or other war atrocities, if they have already endured any (CVT, 2020)

The motives of success within the GCC states remain the same since the 1930s. The council wanted to become a part of the leading countries in the world, and in 1938, their key was their new discovery of oil. The status of the GCC now is contingent on their ability to rebrand their countries to appeal to foreign investors and tourism (Mansoor, 2022). Many of these rebranding efforts, such as "Vision 2030" in Saudi Arabia, the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, and the Dubai Expo 2020, continue to worsen the labor conditions of migrant workers every day (Sharp, 2021).

3. Case Study

Migrants Working Conditions within Qatar

The development and growth of Qatar's public sector has been its priority for many years now. The overall success of Qatar's tourism sector has been at the expense of the lives of migrant workers. One of Qatar's largest projects was hosting the FIFA World Cup in November of 2022. In 2013, when construction began, various reports came out highlighting the conditions migrant workers were experiencing in Qatar. One of the most shocking studies reported that nearly one

Nepalese worker would die each day from cardiac issues/heart attack in Qatar (Gibson & Pattisson, 2014). The heightened pressure the government had placed upon its labor sector and migrants specifically, has led to serious high-risk working conditions that had led to high rates of death and injury.

Based on the trajectory of deaths report in 2013 it states, "projections show another 4,000 migrant deaths are expected to happen by the time the World Cup is hosted" (Aboud, p. 10, 2020). Predictions soon became true. A study done in 2019 by Pradhan et. al, called attention to the fact that excess heat exposure was the leading cause of death among Nepalese workers who worked in Qatar. After returning from working and building the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium for the World Cup, a significant number of migrants were mysteriously falling ill. This study found that the high percentage of deaths of migrant workers in Qatar during and following the summer months were due to cardiovascular problems and heat strokes (Pradhan et. al, 2019). The issue of heat stroke is nothing new. In 2007, Qatar passed a decree that banned working outdoors from the hours of 11:30am to 3:00pm, during the summer months, due to the high rates of heat strokes (HRW, 2017). In Qatar today, temperatures can get up to 112 °F or higher, and workers report working throughout the day, with no water, lacking shaded areas and no access to food while working (Baker & Kashi, 2022). The decree to limit working hours, was treated as a suggestion and has and will continue to be the cause of death of thousands of migrants.

In the recent years there has been a rise in publication from NGOs and news outlets around the world that have exposed various unacceptable working conditions within Qatar. Many blame Federation International de Football Association (FIFA) for the labor laws, but research has shown these conditions are due to the regulations set by Qatar's labor laws. These publications have led to investigations of the role of the Kafala system and Qatar's ineffective labor laws. It took until

recently for the news to break but "as a result of FIFA's selection of Qatar as World Cup host, this on-going systemic issue has (finally) entered the transnational public sphere" (Duval, 2022, pg. 7). In response, Qatar implemented new labor laws that overall exasperated the situation. The long-term effects of implementing new labor laws in Qatar has presented to be an unexpected consequence of the wide-spread judgement they felt (Pattisson, 2022).

One of the laws newly implemented, ordered migrant workers to be sent home in September of 2022, prior to the start of the World Cup. As reports attempted to bring about more advocacy for better labor protection laws, it unfortunately resulted in migrant workers losing their jobs as well as being forced to leave Qatar with large amounts of debt (Pattisson, 2022). This law specifically was also another ploy to decrease the migrant population in Qatar and move towards nationalization of jobs in Qatar (Alsahi, 2020). Therefore, migrants were laid off with short notice, lacking the means to return home safely. If they were fortunate to return home, they and their families suffered severely, as for many, this was their main source of income (Pattisson, 2022). As the government implemented this regulation, employers were able to fall back on the Kafala system's rules of ownership that allowed them to withhold wages in order to stay afloat.

There are agencies that still consistently attempt to employ and mistreat migrant workers within the GCC. Many of those who have been reported were placed on various watch-lists of international agencies like the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Human Rights Watch (HWR). Extensive investigations and surveys are being taken to identify the true conditions workers are experiencing, and to identify which companies they belong to (ILO Global Estimates, 2017). As a consequence again, various agencies abandoned their workers, and tore up their contracts in order to disconnect themselves from the responsibility of their crimes (Amnesty International, 2018). More migrant workers are now left with no assistance to regain their

passports, personal belongings, or any means of resources to ensure they obtain their paychecks in Qatar (Pattisson, 2022).

There have also been countless reports of migrant workers exhibiting high levels of psychological illness. Many suffer from neurosis, psychosis, personality disorders, and feelings of aggression and suicidal thoughts (Alrasheed et al., 2017). Feelings of entrapment within their job, with no money or means of being able to return to their family, factor into these psychological developments. In the current day and age of Qatar, the development of the World Cup is the most prevalent factor that has allowed for worsened conditions for migrant workers. Many of these workers have spent years working in Qatar, as it took almost a decade to build the infrastructure to host the event. Then after all this time, the majority returned home with significantly less money than expected, debt from illegal fees, and debilitating illnesses (Duval, 2022).

Various collaborative policy reforms have been conducted in Qatar in attempt fix this issue. Qatar has said they are working with the ILO to introduce various labor protection laws. In 2020 Qatar has implemented new reforms to the Kafala system. Migrant workers are now able to change jobs without being restrained by their employer, and workers are also supposed to be given a monthly minimum wage (HRW, 2021). The Emir of Qatar, Sheik Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani pushed for these reforms within the labor sector in 2020 (Amnesty, 2020). Currently, to change the constrains of the Kafala system and abolish it, the reform must be passed by the advisory council of Qatar and be approved by the Emir (Freedom United, 2019). According to Amnesty International "full implementation remains key if the country aims to truly end labor exploitation" (Amnesty International, 2020).

4. Methods

4.1 Data Collection

I have analyzed pre-existing interviews and reports that highlight how ineffective labor laws, the Kafala system, the current refugee crisis, as well as COVID-19 truly contribute to the development of forced labor trafficking. In order to present unbiased data regarding how prominent these four factors are to the development of forced labor trafficking; I used interviews and personal statements from both laborers and sponsors. By choosing to analyze both perspectives, the research shows validity regarding the true mistreatment of laborers. I have pulled crucial information from certain investigative surveys and graphs that expose the process of labor trafficking. The majority of the data I have analyzed comes directly from documented investigations conducted by various NGOs.

Many of the NGO reports I have reviewed were from the International Labor Organization, the Human Rights Watch, and Migrants-Rights and Amnesty International. I will present how the interviews and reports show how the role of the current and previous factors I presented attribute to the development of labor trafficking of migrant workers in the GCC. Pulling qualitative data from the interviews and quantitative data from the reports, I will present how these factors have led to worsened conditions for migrant workers within the GCC.

4.2 Procedure

As discussed, I have chosen to, firstly, analyze both narratives from labor workers in the GCC and sponsors in the GCC. The interviews of labor workers consist of recent labor workers or current labor workers who work(ed) in the GCC. The interviews of the sponsors' statements consist of previous and current agents/sponsors who have or plan to continue to employ and participate in trafficking labor workers. By looking at these two perspectives, the statements highlight how, at least, one of the four factors contribute to theirs and others forced labor trafficking. I have extracted information from previous workers and sponsors in order to highlight

the severity of ineffective labor laws and the Kafala system. Then, those current workers' and sponsors' statements are used to see how the current refugee crisis and COVID-19 affected forced labor trafficking.

Secondly, to supplement the narratives derived from the interviews, I will show reports that either prove or disprove how each factor has statically helped labor trafficking. In this regard, each factor has its own sub factors that can be measured in order to identify the importance and growth of the main subject. For example, with regards to the Kafala system, I analyze the three clauses of the regulation I believe to have prominence in its contribution to labor trafficking. The three clauses define whether workers can change jobs without permission, leave without permission, and change employers. I then will highlight the difference in implementation the clauses in each GCC country. I will add additional information concerning the number of remittances sent and received to the GCC countries to highlight how the GCC countries with the strictest Kafala system are those who have the highest amounts of money sent out.

4.3 Data Analysis

In this research project, I begin by introducing the key factors that I believe contribute to the development and advancement of labor trafficking. I then conduct an integrative analysis of each factor (the Kafala system, ineffective labor laws, COVID-19, and the current refugee crisis) showing how each component is complex as to why it has a strong effect on labor trafficking in the GCC. For each factor, I have shown how they relate to each other and many times one factor is responsible for the advancement of another. I also describe the prominence of the migrants being from South Asian countries and how I have been able to get most of my data from their sources, and not the GCC reports. I conclude with explaining the difficulty in finding longitudinal personal interviews and reports of the experience's victims have had while working within the labor force

in the GCC. I also highlight the data by showing how many GCC states have progressively changed to improve this issue and what they have done recently.

5. Results

5.1 The Kafala System

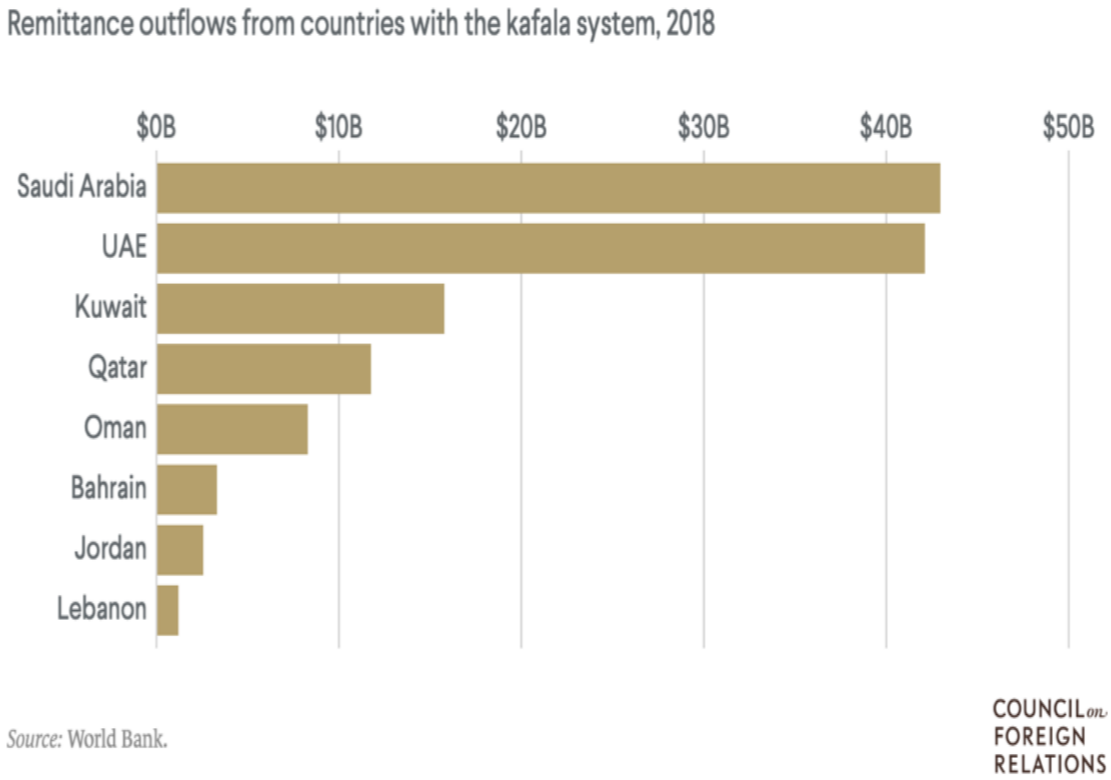
With regards to the Kafala system, the narrative of the employers interviewed across various sites did not differ in ideals. Employers showed a high rate of pride in their work and overall, they did not deny practicing their power over the workers, but rather stated it was necessary in order to protect their workers. One employer used the common excuse of protecting womanhood by saying, "I always say they are not allowed to be out of the house during the week….I wouldn't dream of having anybody who was going to engage in sexual relations here to my knowledge because A, it is illegal, and B, if they did get pregnant, that is whole load of hassle, and cost, and all the rest of it" (Silvey & Parrenas, 2019, pg. 27). This "protective" stance is taken by many employers who impose harsh conditions on workers. Employers who employ workers from South Asia say they are protecting them from committing illegal acts and believe they are treating them better than they deserve (Pattison, 2013). The strictness of the Kafala system and the ineffective labor laws allows employers to restrict their employees' liberties.

The Kafala system has been so prominent for decades due to the lack of knowledge of the system in general. This has proven to be less and less effective in today's age, as many know of the system's injustice. An interesting development is the power of publicity. Sponsors for decades have stated they are "helping" labor workers, as the true stories of the workers were kept within the workers' memories. As for the Kafala system, the GCC countries lack any excuse to shut out the voices of the survivors. An NGO called 'This Is Lebanon' published pictures and descriptions of employers who have threatened, abused, and withheld money from migrant workers employed

in the GCC. They also highlight success stories of workers who have, with the help of the NGO, been able to leave forced labor jobs and sponsors and were given their full wages (This Is Lebanon, 2023).

Sponsors put a lot of emphasis on how migrants send a significant amount of their wages to their families. Wages are (defined by the Kafala system) to be given to migrant workers by their employers and employers determine if they get paid on time or at all (Robinson, 2022). The Council of Foreign Relations highlights how the financial payment transfers have greatly increased within the countries that use the Kafala system (CFO, 2018). Graph 1 highlights how the greatest GCC countries by size and infrastructure (Saudi Arabia and the UAE) are the ones which have the largest amount of money going out in the form of external transfers. Within the various NGO reports, the data shows that Saudi Arabia and the UAE have consistently been avoidant with regard to abolishing the Kafala system.

Graph 1: From Which Kafala Countries Do Migrant Workers Send the Most Remittances? (Council on Foreign Relations)

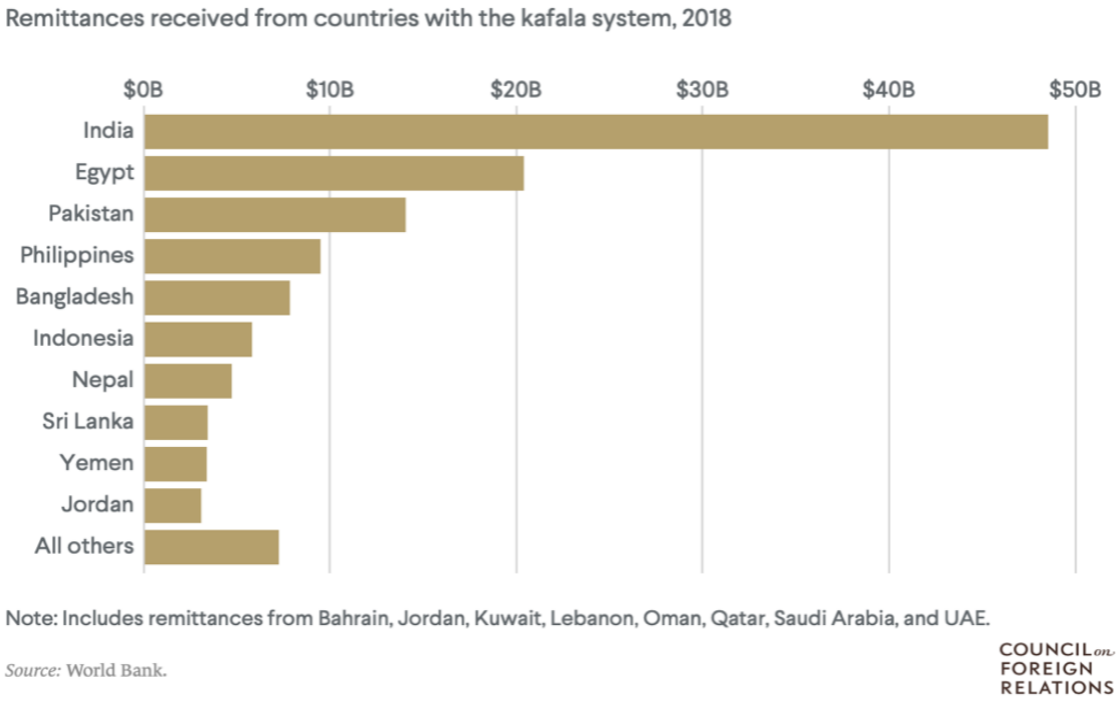


This prominent outflow of remittance is not because workers are receiving higher pay within these countries, is due to the larger numbers of workers in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Saudi Arabia is known for having over eleven million foreign workers within their country (Rasooldeen, 2017). Saudi Arabia also is described to have a growing labor market. UAE is known for having eight million foreigners working as temporary contract workers (ILO, 2022). The prominence of such high remittances is not a new concept. A report from ILO in 2015 stated that "foreign workers in the UAE contribute to their home countries more than 29 billion US dollars in 2014" (ILO, 2015, pg. 1). This report below from 2018 shows how Saudi Arabia and UAE have over forty billion remittances being sent out of their countries. For the UAE that is a 12 billion dollar increase of remittances outflow in four years.

Graph 2 highlights the countries that receive the most remittances overall. India is the top recipient of remittances, receiving almost fifty billion dollars. 'India Migration Now' shows that

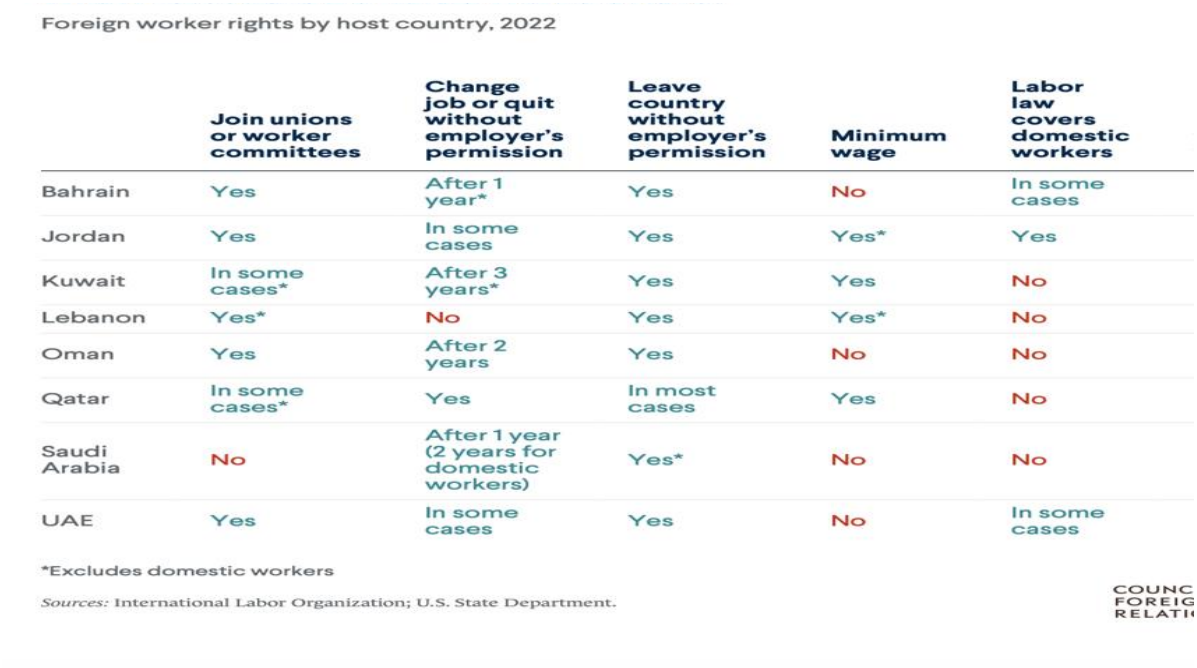
8.5 million Indians work within the GCC, which exemplify why India is the top receiver of money from workers in the GCC (Singh and Arimbra, 2019). If I was to use the number given by 'Indian Migration Now' workers in India would be making about 4,705 dollars yearly. That is about 22 dollars a day when in reality they are working for 10-12 hours a day in the heat with no breaks.

Graph 2: Where do Remittances from Kafala Countries Go? (CFR)



The Kafala system has continued to place unfair restrictions on workers for centuries and each country differs in which restrictions they enforce the most or not at all. Table 1 highlights which GCC counties provide certain liberties to their workers and which ones limit their workers the most. The three factors that limit migrant workers within the Kafala system are: (1)whether workers can change jobs without sponsorship permission, (2) their ability to quit jobs without permission and, (3) their ability to leave the county without a sponsor's permission.

Table 1: What Protections Do Kafala Workers Have? (CFR)



Foreign worker rights by host country, 2022

	Join unions or worker committees	Change job or quit without employer's permission	Leave country without employer's permission	Minimum wage	Labor law covers domestic workers
Bahrain	Yes	After 1 year*	Yes	No	In some cases
Jordan	Yes	In some cases	Yes	Yes*	Yes
Kuwait	In some cases*	After 3 years*	Yes	Yes	No
Lebanon	Yes*	No	Yes	Yes*	No
Oman	Yes	After 2 years	Yes	No	No
Qatar	In some cases*	Yes	In most cases	Yes	No
Saudi Arabia	No	After 1 year (2 years for domestic workers)	Yes*	No	No
UAE	Yes	In some cases	Yes	No	In some cases

*Excludes domestic workers

Sources: International Labor Organization; U.S. State Department.

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Based off Table 1, workers are allowed to change jobs or quit without permission after one year in Bahrain, after 3 years in Kuwait, after 2 years in Oman, in all cases in Qatar, and "in some cases" in UAE. The majority of the GCC countries make workers wait up to a year to change or quit. Qatar has decided to get rid of the Kafala system but realistically "re-naming its Kafala system but retaining the worst aspects of a legal system that denies the most fundamental rights to migrants" (International Trade Union Confederation, 2016, pg. 2). Within the 1-year time frame there have been reports of withholding pay and passports as well as worsened treatment by sponsors. The choice to change jobs comes with significant consequences to the workers' well-being. Therefore, the choice is not a common one.

Regarding workers' ability to leave the country without a sponsor's permission, 5 out of 6 GCC countries agree that workers are allowed to leave the country without employer's permission, with Qatar defining it as yes "in most cases". The problem is that in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, workers need to ask for an exit permit from the employee before they leave. Employers

can deny exit permits when they are asked and that stops the progress abruptly. In other GCC countries, employers also report their employee left the job without permission and workers can face serious criminal consequences (Motaparthy, 2015). Then, those who are charged with absconding charges are prohibited from leaving the country until charges are cleared and the sponsor agrees. In Kuwait, for example, there are 12,000 unsolved charges of workers absconding (Motapathy, 2015).

5.2 Ineffective Labor Laws

The laws and reforms that have been enacted in the previous years were in theory initiated to fix the corruption of the labor force in the GCC. But research has proven the laws has been barely enforced. The effectiveness of the laws does not stem from bad policy or initiatives it is solely defined by the defiance of the sponsors and officials within the GCC who ignore the reform. Highlighted above, I touched on the prominent migrants' rights within the Kafala system that were passed within the GCC that gave workers the right of mobility and discretion within the labor force.

Firstly, there are new laws that allow for more transfers. The impact of these laws have been reportingly slim and have not even made a dent in improving the labor lives of migrants. Overall, the transfer rate of migrant workers is 3% and lower (Kagan & Cholewinski, 2022). Using Oman, UAE, and Bahrain as examples, it highlights how realistic the impact of the new labor laws is. Oman reported 60,958 out of 1,692,581 new workers were transferred in 2019. Overall, that is a transfer rate of 3.6%. UAE gave more of a range, having 229,971 transferred between January 2016 to December 2019 out of 6 million workers, having an over transfer rate of 1% per year. Bahrain reported quarterly data, and specifically in the fourth quarter of 2020, the total number of

transfers was 16,468, and based on the wider population of workers it was an overall 3% transfer rate for that year (Kagan & Chloewinski, 2022).

The new law regarding the ability to change an employer, is more complicated and the process to initiate the change is lined with obstacles. With or without permission, reports show there is high difficultly in being able to change sponsors which led to the minimal impact of the law. The main elements that were preventing workers from changing their employers were that many workers were unaware of their right to do so, and many lacked the ability to find a new employer. Also, in doing so they knew the risk of losing their sponsor, money, and housing. Another risk is being targeted by their current employer in retaliation; workers would not receive wages owed to them (Kagan & Cholewinski, 2022).

Many of the GCC states have been declaring that they have also passed laws and regulations to improve the "quality of life" of migrant workers. Qatar has made various statements that they are specifically focusing on bettering living conditions for their workers and doing it fast (Ardemagni, 2022). Table 2 is a survey done in 2022 that shows the distribution of camps, the respondents within the camps, and the overall proportion of individuals within Qatar. Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents live in very large camps which usually have 200 or more residents living within. Table 2 also shows that most of the camps within Qatar are small camps with about 7 to 19 residents. Out of 645 respondents they lived in 133 different camps varying in size.

Table 2: Distribution of Camps and Respondents (Le et. al)

Camp Types	Camps	Respondents	Proportion (%)
Very small (2–6 residents)	27	27	5.3
Small (7–19 residents)	46	92	14.4
Medium (20–49 residents)	26	120	20.2
Large (50–199 residents)	19	153	24.2
Very large (200+ residents)	15	253	35.9
Total	133	645	100

Also, the new labor law called the Wage Protection System was introduced in the GCC to keep employers accountable by workers being able to receive their pay through an online bank directly. The system is supposed to monitor employers to ensure they are kept in line with paying their employers on time, and if they do not, they receive a fine. This system was an innovative reform, but like many others fell short in its process. There have been various reports of companies paying off the system to allow them to be late on payments or not pay at all. For example, reports came out about "a Qatari employer that did not pay its managerial staff for five months and its laborers for two months before workers publicly protested the situation" (HRW, 2020, pg. 1).

4.3 COVID-19

The disease itself cost millions of lives and with that it worsened the already insufficient conditions migrant workers lived and worked in. COVID-19 itself created a very problematic

situation for migrant workers. Employers and sponsors used COVID-19 to underpay workers for an increased profit. There are causational factors like salary cuts, layoffs, and reduction in remittances that the GCC states it could not prevent entirely. Conversely, there are factors like abandoning workers, withholding previous payments and access to medical services, health insurance and proper facilities to space workers out to prevent the spread (McQue, 2020).

While conditions worsened for workers, the need to provide for themselves and their families back home remained increased when COVID-19 began. Various migrant workers were responsible for providing for their families back home and when COVID-19 occurred, their duty to provide increased as many of their family members lost their jobs or became sick. A young woman who was working within the UAE at the time of COVID-19 expressed her struggle and the stressors that came along with the pandemic. She states “the hardest part is not the COVID19, but when my family calls me for food and school tuition, and there's nothing I can do about it. I have to sell food even in times of COVID19. It's the only thing I know” (Alsharif & Malit, 2020, pg. 10).

One of the most reported mistreatments of workers was how unsafe it was for migrant workers to remain in the GCC during COVID-19. The Journal of Global Health Economics and Policy (JoGHEP) highlighted the number of reported deaths from each GCC country. Table 3 highlights the mortality rate of workers who migrated from Bangladesh, Kerala, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, in each GCC country.

Table 3: Mortality disparities among international migrant workers in GCC countries and Singapore (Journal of Global Health Economics and Policy)

	Bangladesh			Kerala (India)			Nepal			Sri Lanka		
	Estimated Population	Total deaths	Deaths /million	Estimated Population	Total deaths	Deaths /million	Estimated Population	Total deaths	Deaths /million	Estimated Population	Total deaths	Deaths /million
GCC countries	4,151,607	**1254**	302.1	1,900,000	**406**	213.7	1,194,500	**474**	396.8	741,000	**89**	120.1
Saudi Arabia	2,000,000	979	489.5	490,000	180	367.3	380,000	52**	**	135,000	6**	**
UAE	710,000	130	183.1	830,000	118	142.2	300,000	36**	**	300,000	8**	**
Oman	680342	30	44.1	180000	24	133.3	17500	*		26000	*	
Qatar	400,000	25	62.5	190,000	16	84.2	400,000	*		140,000	*	
Kuwait	181,265	75	413.8	130,000	59	453.8	62,000	*		130,000	7	**
Bahrain	180,000	15	83.3	80,000	9	112.5	35,000	*		10,000	*	
Singapore	152,000	2	13.2	26,000	0		2,000	0		11,000	0	

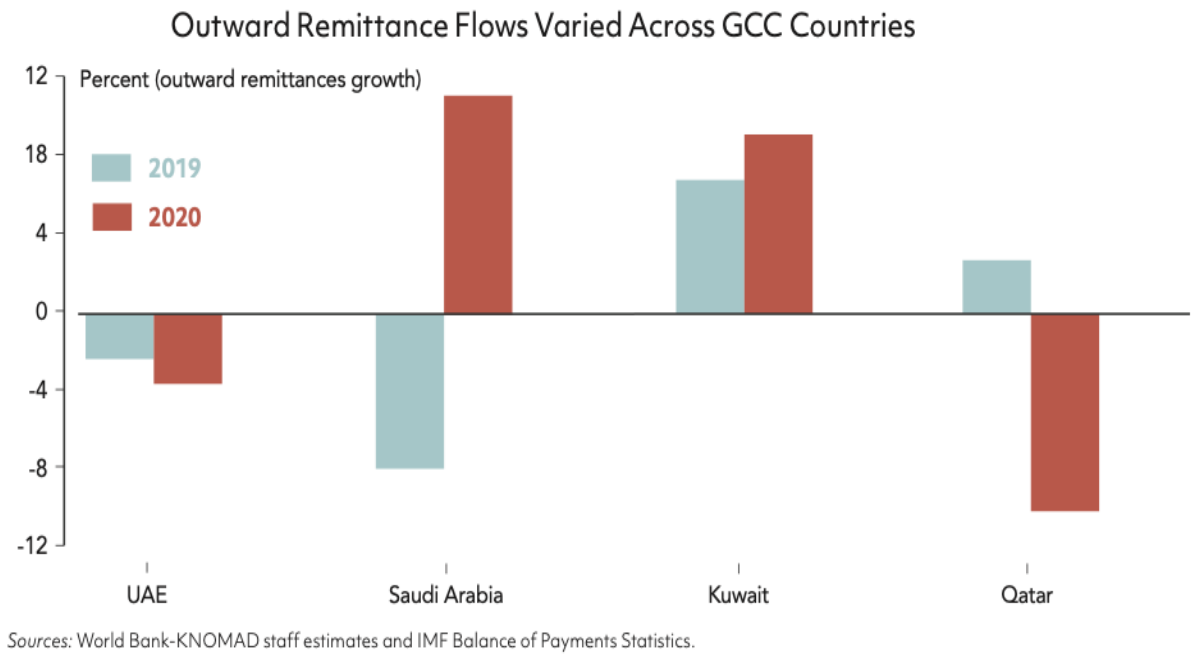
* Data is not available; ** Incomplete data; See additional file for data sources

The data in Table 3 shows the highest total of deaths in the GCC were those migrants from Bangladesh and the lowest total deaths being migrants from Sri Lanka. It is also clear there is a lack of data from various sections of the graph. The mortality rate of migrants from Sri Lanka and Nepal is only given by Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait. Therefore, the data's validity is low due to various countries not reporting the death rates. There was also data missing from Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the deaths per million of migrants from Nepal and Sri Lanka. Saudi Arabia also had the highest total deaths, or the largest deaths reported. The Journal of Global Health Economics and Policy discussed how many of the figures are incomplete due to the lack of data reported from the countries in the GCC (Hossain et. al, 2021). There is also a significant discrepancy of numbers between sources. The GCC countries have been known to under-report to lessen the blow.

There is significant research showing migrant workers had a higher rate of death within the GCC countries from getting COVID-19 then back in their hometown. The Journal of Global Health Economic and Policy also discovered there were almost 8 million International migrant workers (from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, India) working in the GCC and "at least 2223 death cases were reported, while only 2 deaths were documented" (Hossain et. al, 2021, pg. 2). A study done in 2021 showed that "non-Kuwaitis had a two-fold increase in the odds of death or being admitted to the intensive care unit compared to Kuwaitis" (Hamadah et. al, 2020, pg. 10). Another study found that there was an 'excess mortality' of migrants who worked in Kuwait as migrant workers in Kuwait increased by 71% and deaths among nationalist only increased by 32.4% (Alahmad et al., 2021)

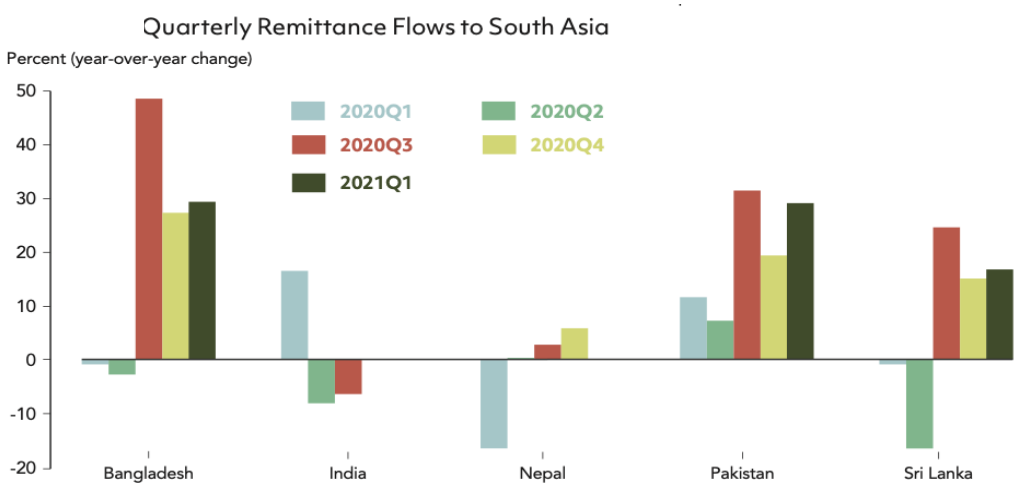
The data also shows there was a large decline in remittances from the GCC in 2020. Many researchers have contributed various reasons for the decline, COVID-19 for one, but also the drop in oil prices, the cancellation of hajj, and the floods in Bangladesh (Jamal, 2021). But for now, it may take some time to go back to normal remittances. The World Bank Group believes that the flow of remittances to the MENA will also be slow due to "moderate growth in the euro area and weak GCC outflows" (World Bank, 2021, pg.2). The rate of remittances has decreased coming out of the GCC states but fortunately, remittances to South Asian countries, which usually gets most of remittances from GCC, has risen 5%. (World Bank & Knomad, 2021).

Graph 3: Outward Remittance Flows Varies Across GCC Countries (World Bank & KNOMAD)



Graph 3 above shows the difference between the remittances coming out of the GCC countries in 2019 and 2020. Interestingly, the graph shows that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait grew in their outgoing remittances. Saudi Arabia started in the negatives at -8% and in 2020 their remittances grew to 8%, which is a 16% increase in remittances. Kuwait had about 6% remittances flowing outward and in 2020 it grew to 9%. UAE and Qatar seemed to struggle the most, having a great decline in remittances. UAE was sending -2% of remittances out in 2019 and decreased by another 2% in 2020. Qatar had a greater decline as in 2019 they had 2% remittances flowing outward but in 2020 they had -10% remittances. It seems each GCC country was able to prohibit the decline, but many were unable to maintain the level of outgoing remittances.

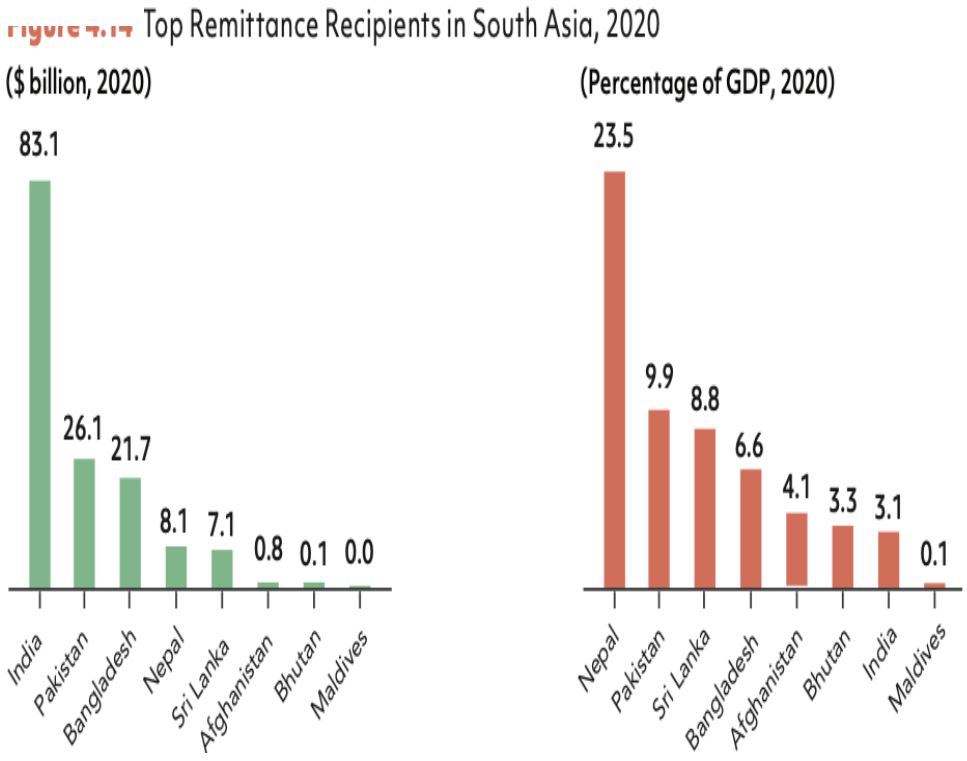
Graph 4: Quarterly Remittance Flows to South Asia (World Bank)



Graph 4 shows the quarterly rates of remittances received by the top countries that receive remittances from the GCC. As shown, India remittances fell .2% which seems to be reflective of the 17% decrease in remittances from the UAE that year (World Bank Group, 2021). In Nepal there was a greater decrease of 2% after the 17% decline in Quarter 1 of 2020. In Pakistan remittances rose 17% due to increased remittances from Saudi Arabia, the European Union, and the UAE that year. Bangladesh showed a 2% increase from 2020 to 2021. Sri Lanka had their remittances increase by 5.8% from Quarter 1 2020 to 2021.

To better explain the reasons for remittance growth or fall in certain countries, many of it is due to the level of dependance each country has on certain regions. As you can see in the graph below, Nepal is the most reliant on remittances, then Pakistan and then Sri Lanka. Nepal has been known to be reliant on the GCC countries and the rates of remittances is reliant on the migrant workers who were able to work that year. The Migration and Development Brief 34, one of the ILO yearly reports on Migration in the GCC, shows that the number of Nepalis that renewed their work permit in the Fiscal year 2020 declined 65.3% from the previous year. This decline could have been the reason for such a dramatic drop in remittances in 2020 (World Bank Group, 2021).

Graph 5: Top Remittance Recipients in South Asia (World Bank)



Since the early 2000s various GCC countries have been attempting to produce more jobs for citizens and limit international jobs. Changes were small and were more suggestive of initiatives for the various governments to make a change. But COVID-19 gave various countries within the GCC the opportunity to cut migrant workers' jobs and re-employ their citizens based on nationalist promises. In 2020, various legislation was passed to limit working hours and job opportunities for migrant workers. The majority of the GCC countries had the same initiatives implemented and "used the pandemic to accelerate their efforts to reduce their migrant workforces by expanding their workforce nationalization schemes" (Alsahi, 2020, pg. 14).

Many GCC states implemented legislation that has led to migrant workers being laid off and abandoned during 2020 (Mcque, 2020). Oman has pushed for the extension of "Omanization" where technical jobs, higher administration, and managerial jobs will be given to Omanis as soon as migrant worker's permits expire (Reuters, 2021). Saudi Arabia has moved to reserve

employment in sales, engineering and technical professions for locals (Arab News, 2023). UAE's Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization presented a resolution that allowed companies to terminate work contracts with non-citizens (migrant workers), in order to give them to UAE citizens (Alashi, 2020). Kuwait pledged to change the demographic and decrease the population of migrants to 30% when it was originally 70% (Sharma, 2020). Bahrain also decided to decrease foreign jobs within their construction and oil production sector and had businesses like Bahrain Petroleum Company cut hundreds of jobs from foreign workers (Salama, 2020). Recently, the Ministry of Labor and Nationalization approved a draft allowing them to reserve manufacturing, services, tourism, hospitality, health, and education sectors for Qatari workers (Sadek, 2023). These policies that promote nationalism decrease the unemployment rate in each country but have caused a significant number of migrant workers to become abandoned and laid off.

The data on total migrants who had their salary cut, laid off and abandoned is limited. Many NGOs highlight that "systematic data is not yet available, it is undisputed that many migrant workers have lost their jobs and left the countries where they were working (ILO, 2021). There are various interviews conducted to combat the lack of data given. One worker, Hassan, who has worked within the UAE for over a decade discusses conditions since COVID-19. Within this article migrant workers stated they were abandoned by their employer and no longer receive food from them. This has led workers to rely on donations and Hassan had said, "Guests on-and-off visit and give something. But when nobody comes, we have to starve. We have nothing." (McQue, 2020).

Table 4: Comparison of Health Insurance Coverage for Migrant Workers in the GCC (Migrant-Rights)

Country	Mandatory health insurance?	Cost of health insurance	Access to Private/Public health care?
Bahrain	No (to be implemented soon) (National)	N/A	Public and Private with national health insurance. As of yet, only public
Saudi Arabia	Yes (Private)	Varies between authorized private health insurers	Public and private for the insured employee.
Kuwait	No (plans to implement soon) (National)	KD130	Dhaman medical centres and public hospitals.
UAE	Only for the Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi (Private)	Varies between authorized private health insurers	Public and private for the insured employee
Oman	No (to be implemented soon) (Private)	Varies between Insurance company licensed to carry out health insurance business in Oman	Expats don't have access to free or subsidized public health services Only emergency health care at public and private hospitals.
Qatar	No (enacted but not implemented) (National)	N/A	Public hospitals and clinics for non-Qataris with health cards.

As you see in Table 4, the majority of GCC countries do not have mandatory health insurance. Saudi Arabia is the only country that allows mandatory health insurance, but it varies based on the providers and if it will be offered to migrant workers. Employers are also still in control of whether their employees know about the insurance and whether they provide it to them. Table 4 also shows that Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar do not have mandatory health insurance for migrant workers, which apparently will be implemented soon.

Each country has obstacles that migrant workers may have to fight through to get proper health insurance. Qatar, for example, gives migrant workers access to "public hospitals and clinics", but they need a health card to receive service. For one, these health cards are hard to obtain as workers have to either go to healthcare centers to get one, or go online to register for one (Buswell, 2023). The problem is that many workers do not have access to transportation or the

internet. Additionally, many workers are not allowed time off to get there, and many may not know this right is given to them. Worsened conditions for migrant workers were detrimental factors such as access to proper health services, the increase demand for remittances, death rates spikes, as well as legislation that pushed workers out of jobs during COVID-19.

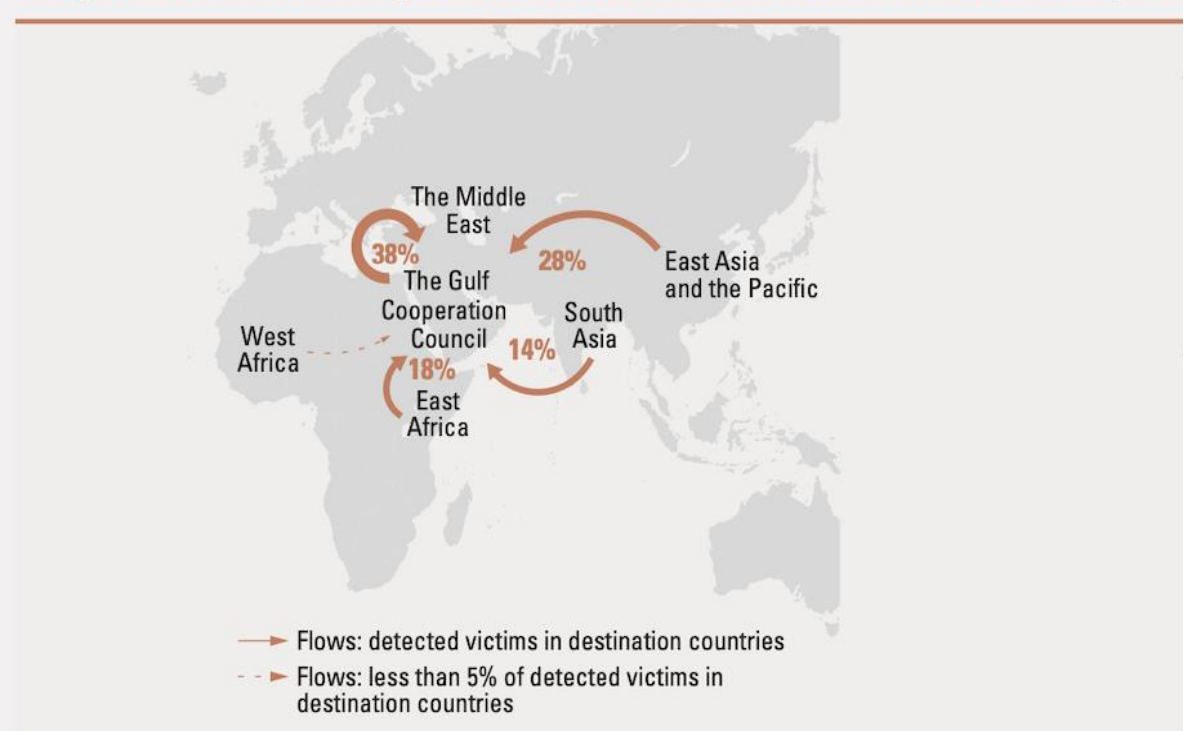
5.4 Current Refugee Crisis

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) stated that the GCC countries specifically host 3/4 of all migrants and refugees in the Arab States (ILO, 2020). Specifically, the current refugee crisis significantly contributed to forced labor migration. The GCC countries not signing the UN 1951 Refugee Convention has kept out a significant number of refugees. Research shows that the GCC countries have yet to sign the agreement due to their worry it would further their demographic imbalance (Charles, 2021). Another researcher has stated the GCC will not sign the agreement in order to protect their sovereignty, and rather contribute to the crisis by offering money to other countries than take in refugees (Arar, 2017). Arar argues that the GCC countries are paying to keep refugees out in order to protect their sovereignty (Arar, 2017). By doing this, it has put a lot of pressure on the Global South, specifically Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and countries within Africa. A significant number of Syrian refugees are in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan & Iraq. Afghan refugees are hosted by Pakistan. South Sudan refugees are in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda. Myanmar refugees are most within Kutupalong, Bangladesh (World Vision, 2022).

Map 1 shows the flow of migration workers to the GCC. Map 1 shows there are 14% of refugees coming from South Asia, 18% from East Africa, 28% from East Asia and the Pacific, and 38% trafficked within the GCC. Within this report, it highlights the significance of victims

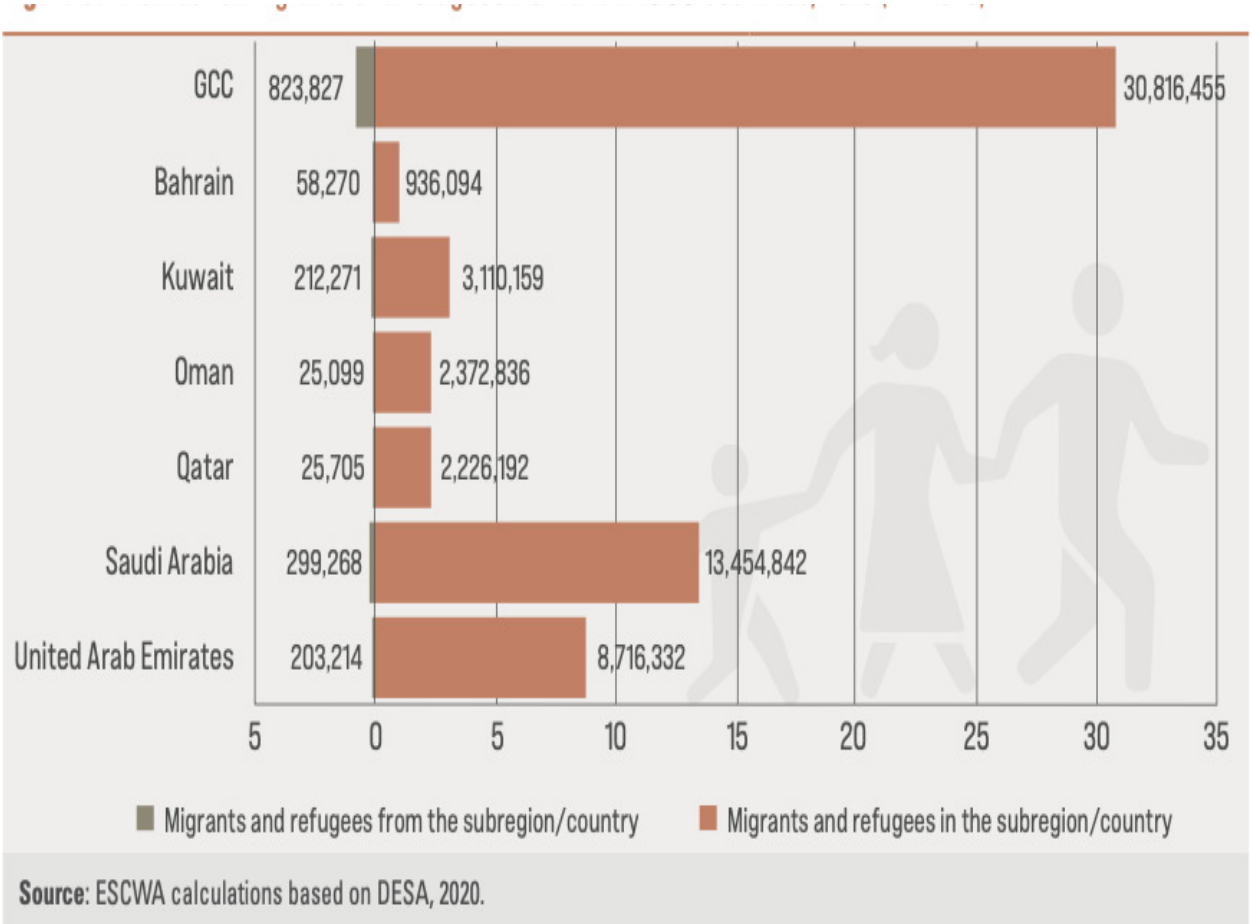
trafficking within the GCC, and the 38% coming from within the GCC are refugees who transitioned into migrant workers to stay within the GCC.

Map 1: Origins of trafficking victims detected in the Middle East, 2018 (or more recent) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)



A significant amount of the data I found regarding the refugees in the GCC, complies refugees and migrants into the same category. Due to refugees unable to migrate safety and stay as refugees, many are recruited to work as migrants in the GCC. This has led to a significant number of refugees become migrant workers within the GCC, therefore the data is unable to distinguish refugees specifically. Graph 6 highlights this issue well. Graph 6 shows there are 30,816,455 migrants and refugees within the GCC. Without the proper distinction, the number of refugees within the GCC is difficult to identify.

Graph 6: Number of migrants and refugees from and in GCC countries, 2020



The trafficking of refugees begins within the refugees who migrate to South Asia who then migrate for work in the GCC. The reason this is a prominent factor that has led to the development of labor trafficking in the GCC is because the GCC benefits from refugees who originally migrated to South Asia. Data shows that approximately 50% of all migrants who migrated to South Asia migrated to the GCC in 2020 (IOM, 2022). In line with the consequences of COVID-19, there was a large percentage of refugees who went to work in the GCC and were stuck there during pandemic in 2020. According to the Asia-Pacific Data Report, the difference is staggering and shows how such large numbers of refugees were caught within the forced labor jobs with migrants from South Asia.

Table 5: Migration Trajectories and plans of Nepalese Migrants (Marko Valenta)

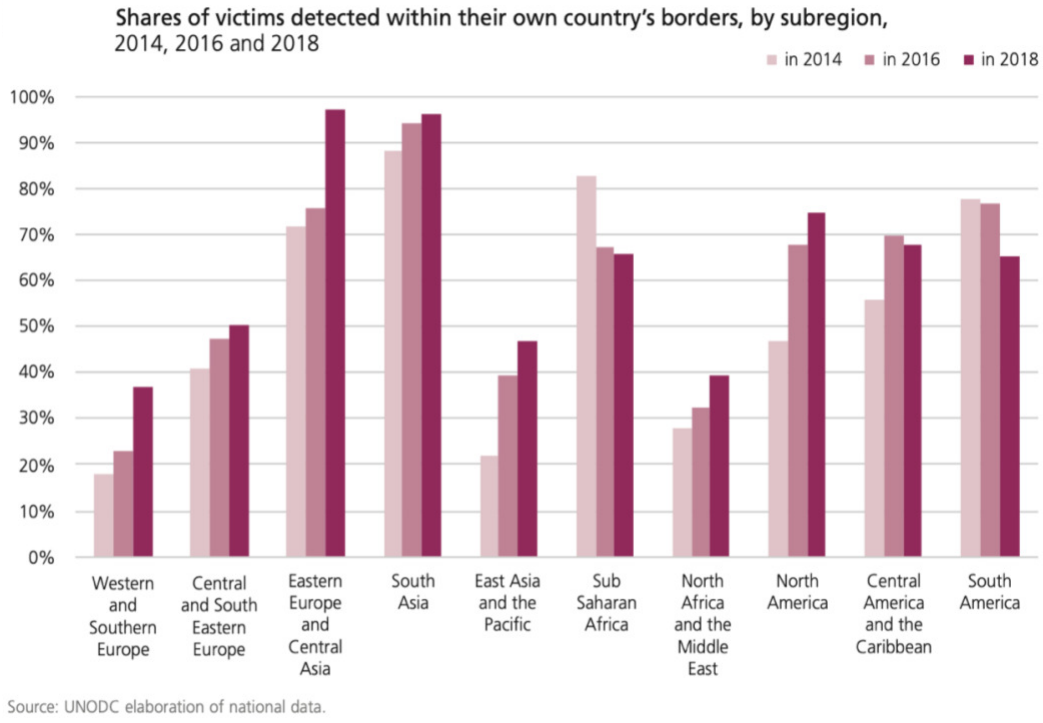
Informant	Age	Trajectory including years spent in the countries	Migration plans
Suman	40	Nepal - India (5) - Nepal (2) - Saudi Arabia (13)	Undetermined
Naresh	27	Nepal - UAE (2) - Nepal (0.5) - Bahrain (2)	Plans to return to Nepal
Hari	30	Nepal - Bahrain (2) - Nepal (0.5) - Hong Kong (1)	Plans to return to Nepal
Bishal	34	Nepal - India (7) - Nepal (0.3) - UAE (2) - Nepal (0.3) - France (3) - Nepal (0.2) - Netherlands (4)	Undetermined
Sachin	25	Nepal - Malaysia (3.5) - Nepal (0.5) - Kuwait (3)	Plans to return to Nepal
Krish	25	Nepal - Qatar (2) - Nepal (2) - Japan (2)	Plans to stay in Japan
Ramesh	37	Nepal - UAE (3) - Belgium (1)	Plans to settle in Belgium
Mohan	39	Nepal - Kuwait (3) - Nepal (0.6) - Canada (0.4) - Nepal (0.8) - Canada (8)	Plans to return to Nepal
Manoj	27	Nepal - UAE (5) - Nepal (1) - Australia (3)	Plans to stay in Australia
Kumar	45	Nepal - UAE (3) - Nepal (0.3) - UAE (2) -Nepal (0.2) - UAE (2) - Nepal (2) - UAE (1)	Plans to return to Nepal
Buddi	32	Nepal - Malaysia (3) - Nepal (1) - Bahrain (0.5)	Undetermined
Manish	32	Nepal - India (1) - Nepal (m/d) - UAE (2) - Nepal (0.2) - UAE (2) - Nepal (1) - UAE (6)	Plans to return to Nepal
Hom	36	Nepal - Qatar (1) - Nepal (6) - USA (1)	Plans to return to Nepal
Sunil	30s	Nepal - Saudi Arabia (2) - Nepal (m/d) - Malaysia (3)	Plans to return to Nepal
Samundra	30	Nepal - Saudi Arabia (2)	Plans to migrate to Portugal
Najir	29	Nepal - Saudi Arabia (3) - Nepal (2) - Kuwait (5)	Plans to return to Nepal
Rajesh	26	Nepal - UAE (3)	Plans to migrate to USA

Table 5 shows the migration trajectory of various refugees. As you can see, everyone started their journey from Nepal and then it varies on where they end up. However, they all seem to migrate to at least two places. Seventeen refugees out of this list ended up in a GCC country for work, whether it be Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, or the UAE. The graph also shows that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are popular places for migrants to work. Table 5 also shows that those that migrate to Nepal do not stay long and averaged around half a year of stay. Also, the majority of refugees who migrate to Nepal, migrate to a GCC country following their time in South Asia.

The reason why the current refugee crisis is prominent to the development of the forced labor trafficking is due to the traffickers and "sponsors" targeting refugees specifically. The large number of displaced individuals and refugees allows them to be able to easily coerce refugees into bad situations by convincing them that they are there to help them and to get them a job. Reports have shown that "refugee camps are a breeding ground of new victims for traffickers and other

criminal networks looking for a cheap or free workforce" (UNODC, 2019). Within South Asia there is a great number of refugees recruited within the camps.

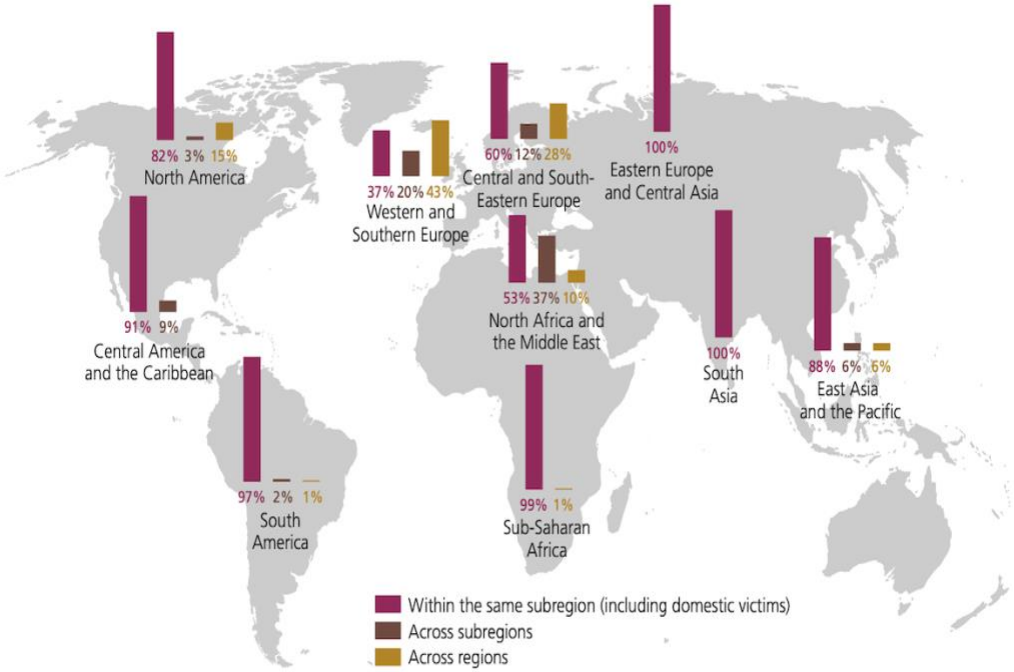
Graph 7: Shares of Victims detected within their own border, by subregion (UNODC)



Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

Graph 7 highlights the rate of victims of trafficking from various regions. This graph exemplifies why the current refugee crisis is such a contributing factor. As discussed above, many workers within the GCC originally migrate from South Asia, and South Asia is where many refugee first travel as shown in the first graph. From 2014 ,South Asian countries were the leaders in victims of trafficking who were trafficked within their own borders. 2016 only had a slight increase in victims of trafficking in the region, but in 2018 it skyrocketed to over 90%. This graph shows that the majority of workers from South Asia are trafficked within to be trafficked elsewhere. Research shows that elsewhere is usually the GCC as "GCC countries have detected large numbers of Asian victims" that work within their foreign labor (ION MENA, 2022, pg. 21).

Graph 8: Shared of detected victims by type of trafficking flows, by subregion (UNODC)

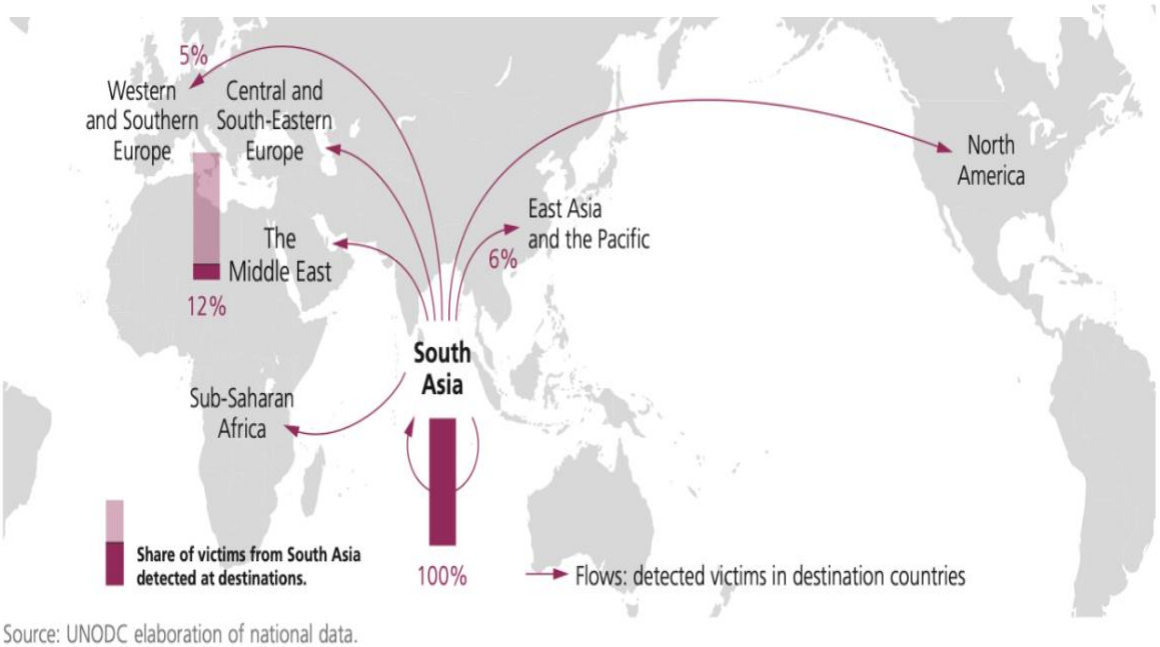


Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Graph 8 emphasizes how large the percentage is of South Asian victims being trafficked from inside their own region. South Asia has a 100% rate of detected victims who are being trafficked within the same subregion to work outside South Asia. Graph 9 below, shows that of the 100%, the highest percent goes to the Middle East. The article discussed that the reason for it not showing high percentages of victims in the region is due to the low number of reports (UNODC, 2019). Despite the low number of reports, Graph 8 shows that the Middle East has the greatest number of trafficked refugees from South Asia. There are a significant number of migrants that transiting through South Asia as well in order to attempt to get recruit to work in the GCC (UNODC, 2019).

Graph 9: Destinations for trafficking flows from South Asia (UNODC)

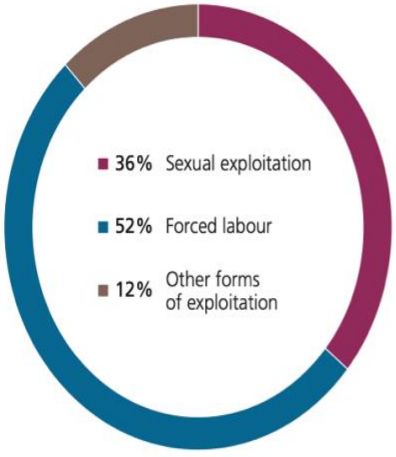


Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Graph 10: Shares of detected victims of trafficking in South Asia and the Shares of trafficking victims detected in South Asia (UNODC)

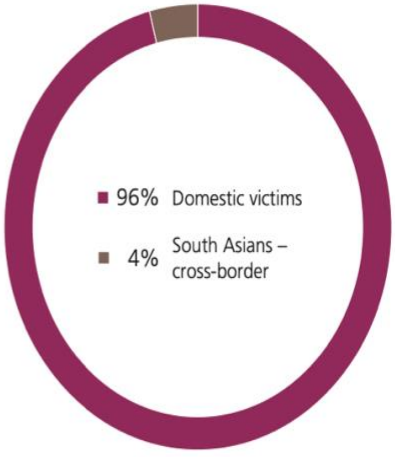
Shares of detected victims of trafficking in South Asia,* by form of exploitation, 2018 (or most recent)



Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

**Based on information on the forms of exploitation for 5,124 victims of trafficking detected in three countries.*

Shares of trafficking victims detected in South Asia, by area of citizenship, 2018 (or most recent)



Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

Specifically, within South Asia refugees are trafficked to work within the GCC for various reasons. Graph 10 above highlights how refugees trafficked from South Asia are recruited to work within forced labor. Also, those who are trafficked, are trafficked domestically by traffickers who promote them to work within the GCC. The high percentage of victims who are deemed to be refugees within South Asia are not recognized as full citizens of South Asia, so their existence is easily forgotten and miscounted. Therefore, recruiters and traffickers are obtaining a whole new group of unidentifiable victims, so they never get caught. The lack of importance on helping each refugee due to overcrowding and large populations of them, has allowed labor trafficking to continue and increase throughout the years.

6. Discussion

The data thoroughly explains various elements that answer and explain the two research questions I posed. The first research question asked, "What roles do the former and current key factors play in contributing to the continuity of labor trafficking of migrant workers in the GCC". The data identified each factor and whether it was the former factors (the Kafala system & ineffective labor laws) or the current factors (COVID-19 & the current refugee crisis), that contributed to trafficking migrant workers to work in the GCC. The former factors played a role in labor trafficking due to their continuous confining features. The current factors exacerbated the development of labor trafficking by creating a greater number of vulnerable migrants, who were quickly targeted by traffickers. My second research question asked, "how have these factors led to worsening conditions of individuals working abroad in the GCC". The data showed that the previous factors, Kafala system and ineffective labor laws, set the bar for inhabitable conditions. COVID-19 and the current refugee crisis were events that completely erased the already low

standards for migrant work and allowed employers to have free reign in what they provided for their workers.

The Kafala system proved to be a continuous contributing factor, but the data highlighted new factors that have ensured its continuation. Traffickers' ability to camouflage has been diminished due to the power of social media and advocacy in recent years. NGOs from countries outside the GCC like the 'This is Lebanon' organization has been luring the employers and sponsors out of hiding. It has limited the loopholes of withholding pay that the Kafala system allows. This, in turn, decreased the number of pay withholding violations. This was a surprising discovery that strictly disrupts the power of the Kafala system, but only disrupts it for a small population of people.

Regarding the data that shows the outgoing amounts of remittances from the GCC countries and being received by various South Asian countries, the numbers highlight a few developments. Graph 3 not only showed the commonality of workers sending all their money back home, but it also allowed me to identify how much money they really make. By analyzing the number of workers in India and how much is being sent out, I was able to identify that workers were making about 12 dollars a day. This highlights how the Kafala system promotes a culture of underpaying workers because of how often the employers are not being checked.

Another aspect that shows the power of Kafala system that I intended to highlight was the inconsistency in protections given to workers. Within the recent years, there have been attempts to eliminate parts of the Kafala system that restrict the rights of workers within the GCC. Table 1 shows that the majority of the GCC countries have changed the restriction of worker's rights. But as I dug deeper into the applicability of the new developments of migrant's rights, I saw that in order to obtain these rights, migrants had to overcome almost impossible conditions to be able to

overcome the Kafala system. For example, I found details of one of the new improvements that allows migrants to leave the country without employer's permission. In order to leave, migrants specifically need exit permits which are usually given by employers. Once their employer learns they are leaving, they can impose them with absconding chargers and deny their exit permits (Mcque, 2020). The reality of the new changes to the Kafala system is nothing that can effectively help migrants but is a ploy from the GCC countries to look like they are being proactive in changing the Kafala system.

Labor laws have also been on the GCC's current agenda to be reformed, but evidence once again shows it to be unsuccessful. I was able to identify that the new labor laws that were used to apparently combat the Kafala system were greatly unproductive. Oman had a 3% transfer rate; the UAE had a 2% transfer rate and Bahrain also had a 3% transfer rate. The data showed that various labor laws that tried to decrease the inhumane conditions of the camps, were overall ineffective. As an example, a survey of Qatar's labor camps shows that of the 133 camps, 54% were very small or small, with significant workers living within the small living quarters. Also, the introduction of the Wage protection system that allowed workers to be able to obtain their wages online, was proven not to be 100% productive as well. There were various reports of ineffectiveness, and specifically, one where an employer did not pay his staff for 5 months and was able to pay off the company to allow him to withhold pay. Overall, the labor incentives and labors are not enforced correctly and efficiently within the GCC countries, and the data shows each one is combated by an overwhelming power struggle where employers will always have an upper hand.

COVID-19 also proved to exasperate forced labor trafficking within the GCC. The better conditions promised by various GCC countries to be implemented for workers living in camps, was completely dissolved during COVID-19. So, large numbers of labor workers were dying and

becoming sick due to the close quarters and dangerous conditions they worked under. These unjust conditions were due to employers wanting to continue working the migrants and ignoring the government provision to stop the spread. This led to less safety restrictions while workers worked, no social distancing, and no access to medical services. The data showed a distinct trend where South Asian workers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka who migrated to work within the GCC were dying a much higher rate than people in their hometowns. There was significant evidence presented as well showing that GCC countries are underreporting the death rates of migrant workers. The data I was able to obtain was from South Asian sources that calculate the loss of life of their people. The graphs and data done by the GCC countries were incomplete and were significantly lower than any other reports I found.

The high rates of employers withholding pay from their workers was another consequence to COVID-19. Due to the widespread impact of COVID-19, research showed an economic decline in the GCC which affected the migrant workers as well (Hossain, 2021). Due to the economic strain on the GCC from lack of tourism, oil prices declined producing an economic standstill, and remittances decrease greatly. The outflow of remittances greatly decreased from the GCC and the countries that were solely dependent on them like India and Nepal suffered the most. Many other South Asian countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan still received stable remittances from other countries during COVID-19. As there was a significant decline in money coming out of the GCC countries, many other migrant workers in other regions were given government money in which they sent back to their families during COVID-19 (IOM, 2022) Another key finding was that workers were still reporting they were working within certain GCC countries, specifically the UAE and Qatar during COVID-19. These two counties have the lowest output percent of remittances across the GCC. These migrant workers were continuing to work and received no pay

despite many others who did not work and were still able to send their pay to their families back home.

Another large development that occurred from COVID-19 is the GCC countries' push for nationalization. Each GCC country implemented harsh laws that intend to take jobs from migrants and give them to their citizens. The idea for nationalization is one each GCC country has been attempting to implement but the way in which it was implement during COVID-19 left migrants abandoned with no wages within various GCC countries. The initiatives presented were all quickly enforced during COVID-19 in order for them to finally make the switch, when everyone was unemployed so it would be less noticeable. The fight between employers who want to pay less for migrants and the government who wants more jobs for its people, is one that catches migrant workers in the middle.

During COVID-19, migrant workers were also not given proper health insurance or health services. Similar to the instances of transferring, migrants are allowed to have health insurance but when you look closer, they are faced with large obstacles. Many GCC countries require migrants to obtain a health card to obtain insurance, and many do not have the means to pay for the health card, get to the health center, or the ability to read and speak the language. This keeps migrants unable to report the various injuries and conditions they have which allows employers to keep working them under forced conditions.

The current refugee crisis has contributed to the development of forced labor trafficking. The current refugee crisis is one that is highlighted well in the media, due to political conflict, but the people themselves are not. The reason it so impactful starts with refugees who choose to travel to South Asia as an escape and upon arrival a significant number of refugees are then offered jobs

to then migrate again to the GCC. The cycle begins in South Asia and always ends in refugees being coerced to work in the GCC.

The evidence showed that South Asia has the second highest percentage of victims who were trafficked within South Asia to work in the GCC. 100% of refugees are trafficked within South Asia are trafficked domestically and of that 100%, South Asian victims migrate the most to the Middle East. The majority of those who work within the Middle East as migrant works are exploited to work in forced labor when they arrive. The current refugee crisis shows a new development where traffickers are working with recruitment agents and employers to lure South Asian refugees to work in the GCC. These tactics used to target and employ refugees is effective as many governments are not tracking their refugee population, and they can be easily moved. The consistent constrains of the Kafala system and the ineffective labor flaws force migrants to remain within the GCC. COVID-19 and the current refugee crisis has created a new system of recruitment and keeps workers flowing to the GCC.

7. Conclusion

Labor trafficking within the GCC has greatly worsened, despite the work of various advocacy and non-profit organizations pushing for reform. The development of each phase of trafficking, from recruitment to confinement, seems to have been ever-changing, so identifying the ways to prevent it, has been unfeasible. Each initiative and labor law passed addresses better conditions and better wages, but do not tackle the dominating reason for the problem. The GCC's push for modernity and economic prosperity has and continues to be its main focus. Many researchers argue that until they reach this high rank of modernity and prosperity, the implications of forced labor trafficking will continue (Winckler, 2010).

Small scaled reforms of the Kafala system have been slowly implemented in the GCC. Within the GCC, Bahrain and Qatar claim to have abolished the Kafala system entirely. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait have made the same claim but only amended certain parts of the Kafala system, like allowing workers to transfer employers without permission (Migrant-Rights, 2022). In 2016, Qatar claimed they were planning to abolish the Kafala system. In 2019, Qatar announced it would be abolished before the 2022 World Cup (Conn, 2019). But the data clearly shows the system continues on. In January 2021, Oman made attempts to amend the Kafala system by canceling no-objection certificates (NOCs), which were required for migrants to switch employers (WAF News Agency, 2020). Bahrain also discussed that they were making their final steps in January 2022 to implement the Wage Protection System (Migrant-Rights, 2022). In the UAE, workers are allowed to change employers, but "lower level" migrant workers are only able to change employers after 6 months of work. If workers want to change before then they will receive an employment ban and a fine. Also, there are many "free zones" where employers who work within these areas technically do not work under the UAE's government regulations. Therefore, they do not have to abide by the reforms (UAE Ministry of Economy, 2023).

International rights organizations and nonprofit organizations deeply criticize the GCC countries' slow responses to eliminate constraining regulations (Malit Jr. & Naufal, 2016). The implementation of newer laws and regulations introduced to combat the Kafala system are always softly enforced. The solution would be to abolish the system as a whole and replace it, as many GCC countries have said they have done on paper. In reality the laws passed barely amend one section at a time. This research project has highlighted the lack of enforcement of the current labor laws and the lack of true elimination of the Kafala system.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current refugee crisis were monumental, and as the research shows, interrupted any progress in improving labor trafficking in the GCC. Traffickers and labor employers collaborated in order to advance their profits by preying on distressed migrants and refugees who were looking for work abroad. Many NGOs argue that these injustices are crimes against humanity that have lasted for decades (HRW,2020). It will be interesting to see if true reform will occur in the GCC countries.

While this paper addresses the key factors that show the development and furthering of labor trafficking, it lacks the ability to truly see many of the long-term outcomes of COVID-19. Reports were limited regarding the data showing how migrants were laid off or abandoned, during COVID-19. Due to COVID-19 being so recent, the majority of the data has not been released yet and may have been difficult to track. This limitation led to me to search for data conducted by South Asian countries. I was then able to find the number of natives who were missing or assumed dead while working in the GCC at that time. Another limitation was obtaining recent statements from migrant workers and refugees during COVID-19. I was able to identify and analyze various interviews of migrant workers who worked in the GCC before 2020 but recent interviews were slim.

Future research on this subject should address the lack of data that reflects the true impact of the various labor laws addressed in each GCC country. There should also be more efforts to investigate the political overview of the Kafala system and the labor laws within the GCC countries. The research I obtained, analyzed the data received from various NGOs and labor organization, but within the GCC, the data is very limited. Therefore, future research could investigate the difference in the knowledge and lack of production of human trafficking in the GCC compared to other neighboring countries. Another subject to research further would be

serial migration. It would be interesting to see how many migrants start in South Asia and travel to the GCC, then to the EU and beyond. Researchers could also analyze the reasons why there is such variation of migration trends.

This project is compelling and reveals the extreme mistreatment of migrants in the GCC. The research also reflects that there is a significant lack of laws that protect migrants and a significant amount of nationalism laws that eliminate jobs for migrants. The four factors presented in this project are the leading contributors that have led to worsening labor trafficking practices in the GCC. Therefore, until these factors are eliminated, the high rates of deaths and inhabitable conditions for migrants will continue to exist.

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